

# Clinical Guidance on Prison Hepatitis B Vaccination

## Frequently Asked Questions

January 2008

### Vaccination Schedule & Doses

**Q. Should I do pre- or post-vaccination blood tests?**

A. *No. It is perfectly safe to give hepatitis B vaccine to someone who has already been fully vaccinated or had hepatitis B infection. Doing unnecessary tests could delay prisoners getting full protection. As many prisoners spend a short time in prison it is more important to take the opportunity to vaccinate against HBV. Immunisation against hepatitis B among prisoners should never be delayed whilst waiting for a blood test.*

**Q. Which HBV schedule should I use?**

A. *Use the most rapidly completed HBV schedule available as prisoners are often transferred to another establishment or discharged from court soon after reception. To provide higher levels of protection for many years, a booster dose should be given at any time after one year of the first dose.*

**Prisoners aged 18+**

*Use the 'super accelerated schedule' (0, 7, 21 days). If this is not possible use the 'accelerated' schedule (0, 1, 2 months).*

**Prisoners aged under 18**

*Use the 'super accelerated schedule' (0, 7, 21 days) under a patient specific direction. If this is not possible, use the 'accelerated' schedule (0, 1, 2 months).*

*The super-accelerated (0, 7, 21 day) HBV schedule is only licensed for use in prisoners aged 18 years and over with one hepatitis B vaccine preparation (Engerix B, made by Glaxo SmithKline). However, the DH Immunisation against Infectious Disease (the Green Book: <http://www.dh.gov.uk/assetRoot/04/12/32/33/04123233.pdf>) recommends the 'super accelerated' schedule can also be used in younger prisoners, but this must be done under a patient specific direction (usually a prescription from the medical officer).*

**Q. Should I give a dose of HBV vaccine if the prisoner doesn't know if or how many doses s/he has had previously?**

A. *Yes. If the prisoner is unsure if or how many HBV doses s/he has had, then it is best to give another dose. As prisoners are often transferred to another establishment or discharged from court soon after reception, any prisoner that starts to inject drugs will be at immediate risk of hepatitis B. It is therefore important to maximise the protection that you offer at this opportunity, as you may not get another chance.*

**Q. Should I give a dose of HBV vaccine if I'm not sure if the prisoner is due a booster?**

A. *Yes. If the prisoner is unsure when their booster dose is due, then give a dose now. The timing of the booster dose is not critical. Although the response to the booster is maximal from one year or more after the start of the course, giving the booster a few months early will probably improve the protection from the first course and again, this may be the only opportunity you get to do this.*

**Q. What should I do if the course is interrupted and the interval between the scheduled doses is exceeded?**

A. Carry on with the schedule where you left off. Lengthening the intervals between vaccinations will, if anything, improve the response to vaccination, although the individual does remain at some risk of infection until they have received three doses.

**Q. How quickly and for how long are prisoners protected after HBV immunisation?**

A. Individuals will receive some protection immediately (indeed the vaccine can protect someone even if the course is started after they are exposed) but to be fully effective the course must be completed on time. Delays in getting the second and third doses could risk the infection taking hold. If a prisoner has one or two doses before leaving prison and is then exposed to hepatitis B, he may be protected. If not, but he returns to prison soon after this and the course is completed, this vaccine can prevent him becoming infected.

*After a full course, it is likely that some protection will remain for life. Immunity may not be complete, but the vaccine will prevent a prisoner getting severe hepatitis and reduce the chance of him developing chronic infection.*

**Q. What are the contra-indications for HBV vaccination?**

A. The only contra-indication to hepatitis B vaccination is anaphylaxis following a previous dose (see Anaphylaxis section below). The vaccine can be given at the same time as all other vaccines. There are many myths about contra-indications, including pregnancy and other medical conditions. In almost all of these situations, the risk-benefit ratio is strongly in favour of vaccination as the risk of infection is much greater.

**Q. Should I give the prisoner HBV vaccine or the combined HAV and HBV vaccine?**

A. If a prisoner requires protection against hepatitis A and B, then a single dose of hepatitis A vaccine should be given with the current hepatitis B dose. With combined hepatitis A and B vaccine, two doses are required for equivalent protection against hepatitis A. Therefore, even in those prisoners where a second dose is given on time, protection against hepatitis A is delayed. The combined vaccine can be used for the booster, however, in prisoners who have had single vaccines in the past.

## Anaphylaxis

**Q. What is the risk of anaphylaxis after HBV vaccination?**

A. The risk of anaphylaxis after HBV vaccination should not be a consideration when deciding whether or not to immunise a prisoner. The risk of HBV infection for prisoners is far higher than the risk of anaphylaxis after HBV vaccination – 87 reports of anaphylaxis among 55 million HBV vaccinations.

**Q. Is a drug-user prisoner at more risk of anaphylaxis after HBV vaccination?**

A. No. A drug user is at no increased risk of anaphylaxis than a non-drug user at ANY vaccination.

**Q. What are the contra-indications for treating anaphylaxis after HBV vaccination?**

A. In the extremely unlikely event of a prisoner having anaphylaxis after vaccination, some concern has been raised about the recommendation that the dose of adrenaline should be reduced if s/he has recently used cocaine. As cocaine levels decline rapidly after use, this situation rarely occurs in practice, and therefore this should not be a consideration at the time of vaccination. Prisoners should NOT be routinely asked if they have used cocaine recently or vaccination delayed for this reason.